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By

E. I. Renick

For
Mr Hamilton

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[From Publications of Southern History Association, July, 1898.]

Harrisburg, Pa.:
Harrisburg Publishing Company,
1898.

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CHRISTOPHER GADSDEN.

By E. I. Renick.

It is not so much Christopher Gadsden's achievements as his virtues and his influence that attract the attention of historians, and win for him the reverence and affection of all capable of appreciating patriotism. His character has been well portrayed by his old friend, Dr. David Ramsay, by Mr. George Bancroft, and by Mr. F. A. Porcher. Mr. Bancroft's well-known eulogy closes with a command to all who rejoice in the union of the colonies to name this unwavering lover of his country as well as James Otis, whenever they count up those who "above others contributed to the great result." What manner of man was this South Carolinian who is thus classed with the inspired "madman" of Massachusetts?

Doctor Ramsay,* who was closely associated with him in private and public affairs for thirty years, gives an account of his life which has been relied upon by later historians. "Mr. Gadsden," he tells us, "had naturally a strong love for independence. He was born a republican. Under well ordered government he was a good subject, but could not brook the encroachments of any man or body of men intrenching on his rights. * * * When the British began their projects for abridging the privileges of the colonies Mr. Gadsden was among the first to take fire. * * * He descried independence when it was afar off, and early foresaw that such was the nature of man that America could never be governed with an exclusive or even a preferable view to her own interest while the fountain of power was three thousand miles distant. He had correct ideas of the rights of man and of

* *History of South Carolina, ii, 457 et seq.*

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the representative system long before Mr. Paine wrote on the subject. * * * His passions were strong and required all his religion and philosophy to curb them. His patriotism was both disinterested and ardent. He declined all offices of profit and through life refused to take the compensations annexed by law to such offices of trust as were conferred on him. His character was impressed with the hardihood of antiquity; and he possessed an erect, firm, intrepid mind which was well calculated for buffetting with revolutionary storms."

Mr. Bancroft, who was familiar with Gadsden's career and had collected some of his papers, declares that "he was a man of deep and clear convictions, thoroughly sincere, of an unbending will and a sturdy, impetuous integrity. * * * He had not only that courage which defies danger, but that invincible persistence which neither peril nor imprisonment, nor the threat of death can shake. Full of religious faith, and at the same time inquisitive and tolerant; methodical, and yet lavish of his fortune for public ends, he had in his nature nothing vacillating or low and knew not how to hesitate or to feign."*

In Mr. Porcher's charming and scholarly *Memoir of Christopher Gadsden*, read in 1876 before the South Carolina Historical Society,† he is described as "a man who could not bend from the dictate of principle to that of policy, and could therefore be neither a good party leader, nor even a good party man. He followed always the impulse of incorruptible honesty, and was the impersonation of the most exalted chivalry. Fear and favor were alike foreign to his nature. * * * Enthusiastic even to rashness in the cause of American Independence, his capacious heart beat as keenly for the wrongs of Massachusetts as for the insults to Carolina. He served his whole country with his whole heart."

* *History of the U. S.*, v., 293'4'5. It is gratifying to observe that "in the author's last revision" (1883) this characterization remains unmodified. See iii, 121.

† Published in Charleston, 1878, by authority of the Society.

The details of the life of such a man cannot but be interesting. He was born in "Charlestown," South Carolina, in 1724. His father—Thomas—is said to have been a lieutenant in the Royal Navy and the King's Collector for the Port of Charlestown.* It is said that Christopher was sent to school near Bristol, England, before he was sixteen years of age, and that there he became a favorite with his father's relatives, the Gascoigns, Halls and Gadsdens. At school he learned Latin, Greek and French.†

Mr. Oliver R. Johnson, the Vice and Deputy Consul General of the United States at London, had the kindness to make inquiries at the Public Record office of that city, where the admiralty and other records previous to the year 1800 are kept, and found that Lieut. Thomas Gadsden was not in the Royal Navy, but in the merchant service, and was placed on half pay from the 27th to 30th of June, 1722—four days only—the amount being paid to his attorney, Edward Jasper, after which date there appears to be no further trace of him.¶

Our Consul General at London—Mr. John C. New—also obtained from an antiquarian of Hertford, England, much valuable information concerning the family of Gadsden,‖ but nothing was definitely ascertained about Christopher's father.

A simple stone in St. Philip's church yard in Charleston bears the inscription: "Here lie the remains of Thomas and Elizabeth Gadsden and of many of their descendants. She died in March, 1727; he in August, 1741."

It is related by Dr. Joseph Johnson in his *Traditions*

* Ramsay, Porcher, Joseph Johnson's *Traditions of the Revolution.*

† Ramsay and Joseph Johnson.

¶ Mr. Johnson to Mr. Wharton, No. 97, September 12, 1890, MSS. Department of State.

‖ Mr. New to Mr. Wharton, No. 126, December 5, 1890, MSS. Department of State.

that Thomas Gadsden lost a large sum of money about the year 1733, gaming with Lord Anson, and paid the debt by giving him titles to all those lands which afterwards bore the name of "Ansonborough."

Lord Anson did sail for South Carolina in 1723 or 1724, and remained there until 1730, and his biographer* says "it is not impossible that while on this station he may have possessed some property, either by purchase or by grant," as his name was given to certain districts.

We have a copy of a letter, however, written by Mrs. Johnson of South Carolina at the time of his visit describing the Admiral as "really so old-fashioned as to make some profession of religion;" "moreover," she adds, "he never dances, nor swears nor talks nonsense."† It used to be said of Lord Anson that "he had been round the world but never in it." The tradition of the Gadsden family is that Christopher, who could not have been more than five or six years of age when this alleged loss occurred and who was but seventeen when his father died, regarded this valuable land as having been gambled away and determined to regain by purchase every foot of it—a resolve which was carried out.

After service in a counting house in Philadelphia and as a purser, Christopher Gadsden devoted himself to the mercantile business in Charleston in which he achieved success. He was occupied as a merchant, a factor and a planter apparently without much interruption for twenty years. In 1759 he was captain of an artillery company in the expedition against the Cherokees, and in 1760 he began his political career as a member of the Commons House of Assembly of the Province of South Carolina. It was here in 1762 that he was the cause of the first serious difficulty between the Royal Governor and the representatives of the people.¶

* Barrows' *Life of Anson*, pp. 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 398.

† Barrows.

¶ Gadsden preserved full minutes of the high-handed conduct of Governor Boone on this occasion.

Governor Boone refused to consider Gadsden properly elected and dissolved the House for contumacy. The quarrel ended in the recall of Boone. No other Governor in that Province ever attempted to control popular elections. It was this interference with the election of Christopher Gadsden that first aroused South Carolinians to a jealous watchfulness of their public rights. Feelings of hatred and distrust then provoked were to grow more bitter in a year or two when Great Britain assumed to tax and govern the Colonies in all cases whatever, and Christopher Gadsden, upon whom the Royal Governor attempted to cast indignities, was to stand for the most decisive and energetic measures.*

There can be little doubt that this habitual contempt with which American gentlemen were treated whenever they had official intercourse with British civil and military officers was a potent cause for resistance in 1765.†

Americans at this time were proud of their strength and sensible of their importance to Britain and they meant to guard their liberties. "Some of these Colonists," says an old historian,¶ "even inherited a natural aversion to monarchy from their forefathers, and on all occasions discovered a strong tendency towards a republican form of government, both in Church and State. "This tendency was particularly strong among a people like the South Carolinians of that day, prosperous, and well educated. Many of them—Gadsden among the number—had been students at English schools and had learned "to set a just estimate on their own talents and acquirements."‖

* The controversy with Boone is given in Johnson's *Traditions*, p. 5. A printed statement of it was preserved for many years by Gadsden's family. The proceedings of the House were printed by its order in the *South Carolina Gazette*.

† Porcher.

¶ Hewat's *South Carolina and Georgia* (1779) ii., 308, 309.

‖ See on this subject Johnson's *Life of Greene*, i., 256; Tudor's *Otis*, 245.

They did not, perhaps, think more highly of themselves than they ought to have thought when they looked down upon this swarm of placemen—those eighteenth century carpet-baggers who were continually playing such fantastic tricks before high heaven. England foisted upon the colonial establishments men whom the Government could not provide for at home. "This cause," said Mr. Gerry on August 6, 1789, in the United States House of Representatives, "lost them America," and he added, "this cause will lose them every dependency where they attempt to play the like game."* Great Britain long since stopped playing this game.

Massachusetts had her Bernard as South Carolina had her Boone. Mr. Tudor, speaking of the "ungracious, impolitic and offensive" manner in which the former submitted a certain resolution, says:†

"His speeches exemplify in full force the humiliating tenure of colonial existence where a mere vulgar placeman apes the tone of the sovereign he represents; and inflated with his transient favor, exercises his representative sovereignty with mock dignity that is not relieved by the graceful consciousness of original power. * * * It is much better to be near the center, where the power is generally the most tolerant and relaxed, and where, if there is arrogance, it is the accompaniment of real majesty; while in the distant provinces, a delegated authority becomes more rigid, more relentless and more offensive from being in the hands of subaltern and often servile agents."

Gadsden had been impressed by this arrogance. His friend Middleton—a provincial officer—had come into conflict with Col. James Grant of the "regulars" in the Cherokee war of 1761. A bitter quarrel ensued—an encounter in which Grant is said to have been struck by Middleton with a cane, and finally a duel between the two officers. Gadsden

* *Annals of Congress*, 1 : 681.

† *Life of Otis*, p. 245.

carefully preserved the correspondence relating to the controversy.*

This incident occasioned intense excitement in Charleston. Its inhabitants came to entertain bitter feelings towards the mother country, and they were soon led to a defiance of British authority.

No man in America strove more earnestly to bring about the Stamp Act Congress of 1765 than Gadsden, and none was subsequently more strenuous than he in its support. His speeches in the Assembly in its favor—though not splendid specimens of oratory—were so energetic that he carried the House with him. He spoke to those "who have ever been jealous of interference with their affairs, of manifestations of external power, and of anything like oppression."†

As early as this—certainly a year later—Gadsden was looking forward to a separation from Great Britain. He had been one of the Assembly in September, 1764, to support the resolutions signed by Peter Manigault, Speaker, and ordered to be printed, "that they might be transmitted to posterity." These were subsequently incorporated in the "declaration of the rights and the grievances of the Colonies" agreed to at New York.¶ Now he was one of the three from the only southern colony save Maryland represented at this first American Congress.‖ It was here he asserted his broad national sentiments. "There ought to be," he said, "no New

* Still in existence in a MSS. volume entitled *South Carolina Miscellan.* It comprises letters from Governor Bull to Middleton January 10 and March 31, 1761, Middleton to Grant July 10 and 19, 1761, Grant to Middleton July 10, 1761, and Governor Bull to Grant April 10, 1761.

† Lodge's *Short History of the Colonies*, p. 171.

¶ Compare Hewat, ii., 321; and Niles' *Principles and Acts of the Revolution*, p. 163. Hewat is reprinted in Carroll's *Hist. Coll. S. C.*, i. See p. 526.

‖ It ought to be remembered that South Carolina took this step toward Continental Union before it was agreed to by any Colony south of New England.

England man, no New Yorker known on this Continent, but all of us Americans."* It was not until September 6, 1774, that Patrick Henry used somewhat similar language. The representatives of nine colonies then in Congress practically founded the American union, for the example of federation then set was never forgotten. "The leaders on the floor were Gadsden and Rutledge, of South Carolina, and Otis, of Massachusetts. Under the lead of South Carolina the arguments founded on chartered privileges were laid aside and the broad doctrines of inalienable rights and liberties were adopted."† This was Christopher Gadsden's distinctive contribution to the deliberations of that Assembly.¶ Mr. Hosmer says that "no public man saw as soon as Samuel Adams that in the latter half of the eighteenth century the time for it [an independent empire in the western world] had come;" and again, "seven years before the Declaration of Independence, nor long after, was there a man except Samuel Adams who looked forward to it and worked for it."‖

* Frothingham's *Rise of the Republic*, p. 188, which consult for an account of Gadsden. See p. 182.

† Lodge's *Short History of the English Colonies*, 311. See on this subject Woodburn's *Causes of the American Revolution*, Johns Hopkins Univ. Studies, X Series, xii, p. 44.

¶ Mr. Frothingham also mentions Robert Livingston of New York as taking this ground. As to the advantages of this Congress see Tudor's *Otis*, pp. 234–5. There was doubtless much subsequent correspondence between Gadsden and those whom he met at New York in 1765—especially with Samuel Adams. See his letter to one of them—Wm. S. Johnson, of Connecticut, dated April 16, 1766, in *Historical Magazine*, v., 260. Ramsay says he was the constant correspondent of Samuel Adams. Gadsden's letter to Charles Garth, agent in London of the Colony of South Carolina, dated December 2, 1765, printed in Gibbes's *Doc. Hist. of the Am. Rev.*, i., 7, contains a full report of what the Assembly had done in the common cause to promote the agreements of the Stamp Act Congress. It is full of Union sentiments. In it he doubtless repeats many of the observations he made in the Congress.

‖ *Life of Samuel Adams*, 372.

But Gadsden had spoken for independence in 1764 to his friends under Liberty Tree and renewed the subject in 1766. In the Provincial Assembly of South Carolina on the tenth day of February, 1776, he also advocated independence of Great Britain.* Mr. Hosmer justly includes him with R. H. Lee, Patrick Henry, and a few others, as "ready for independence" as early as September, 1775.†

Few facts are better atteste l than that Christopher Gadsden, when the Charleston community was in ecstasy over the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766, convened a party of his friends—their names are well known, recorded by the faithful Gibbes¶—and urged them not to relax their opposition and vigilance, declaring that Great Britain would never relinquish her designs or pretensions. Reviewing all the chances of succeeding in a struggle to break the fetters whenever again imposed he pressed them to prepare their minds for the event.‖

Did Samuel Adams or any one else speak earlier for independence? Doctor Ramsay, who was a part of the revolutionary forces, admits that prior to 1776 a reconciliation with Great Britain was the wish of almost every American, but he excepts "Christopher Gadsden in the South and John Adams in the North."**

In July, 1774, a large number of gentlemen from almost every part of the Colony met in Charleston to consider what

* Johnson's *Traditions*, 41. See account of his rupture with Drayton on this subject in 2 Drayton's *Memoirs*, 172.

† Hosmer's *Samuel Adams*, 340.

¶ *Documentary History.* It is an interesting fact that the great majority of these were mechanics, carpenters, painters, saddlers, blacksmiths, &c.

‖ Johnson's *Life of Greene*, i., 266, foot note. See foot note, p. 265, for description of two parties in South Carolina desiring a redress of grievances. The radical wing, of which Gadsden was the leader, "used all pretexts to press for absolute independence or a state approaching to a confederation."

** *History of South Carolina*, i., 287.

action should be taken in view of the annulment of the charter of Massachusetts and the closing of the port of Boston. They chose representatives to the Congress at Philadelphia. Christopher Gadsden, Thomas Lynch and Edward Rutledge —who at this time were anxious for independence and desired a general non-importation and non-exportation agreement—were among those elected, though the mercantile interest generally was opposed to their principles. It was in this Congress that Gadsden advocated an immediate attack upon Gage in order to defeat him before he could secure reinforcements. It was here that this disinterested patriot, though all his life engaged in commerce, withstood his associates who wished in the interests of South Carolina to except rice and indigo from the general non-exportation agreement. He had just finished a large wharf in Charleston at great cost, and his hope of reimbursement would be dashed to the ground if trade were suspended, but this did not deter him from urging a complete severance of all commercial relations with Great Britain. It was in this Congress that he uttered that most worthy and memorable sentiment which historians have delighted to record. Timid members had mentioned the alarming dangers to which our coast cities were subjected.

"Our seaport towns, Mr. President," replied Gadsden, "are composed of brick and wood; if they are destroyed we have clay and timber enough to rebuild them. But if the liberties of our country are destroyed where shall we find the material to replace them."* Mr. William Wirt Henry, repeating this speech, exclaims: "This unselfish man was one of the most determined and unflinching of the patriots."†

Mr. Porcher records a speech of Gadsden in the Assembly of South Carolina which illustrates his hot impetuosity, his astonishing earnestness that ignored all forms and ceremonies. Another instance may be cited.

* Elliott's, *The New England History*, ii., 288.

† Henry's *Life of Patrick Henry*, i., 229, note.

When it was provided by Parliamentary bill that the trade of Boston might be recovered on proper apology and upon payment for the tea destroyed, Gadsden sent a generous contribution to the distressed people of that town with the terse injunction, "Don't pay for an ounce of the damned tea."*

Not only did he speak and vote for a suspension of commercial relations, but he was "uncommonly active" in afterwards enforcing the prohibitory laws, "though few men lost more by them than he did."†

Gadsden served in the Congress of 1775 and in that of 1776. But he was called home to assume command of all the South Carolina troops before the Declaration of Independence was drawn. It was a life-long regret with him that he was thus prevented from signing that famous instrument. Had he remained a few months longer he would now no doubt be found among the various "Worthies" and "Makers of America" and "Statesmen" to whom series of volumes are devoted.

February 10, 1776, was a memorable day in the Provincial Congress of South Carolina. Gadsden, who was there to receive its thanks for his services at Philadelphia, was added to the committee to consider the resolve of the Continental Congress respecting a form of government.

Many members opposed it—some because it was too decisive a measure, others because their powers did not warrant such a step.

"On this occasion, Colonel Gadsden (having brought the first copy of Paine's pamphlet, 'Common Sense') boldly declared himself not only in favor of the form of government, but for the absolute independence of America."¶

This was like a thunder clap. The majority had no thought of such aspirations. John Rutledge, one of the

* Bryant's *Pop. Hist.*, iii., 376.

† Ramsay.

¶ 2 Drayton's *Memoirs*, 172, 173.

supporters of the Revolution, rose in reproof, declaring he would ride day and night to Philadelphia to assist in re-uniting Great Britain and America.* The few who approved the idea thought Gadsden very imprudent in thus suddenly declaring for it.

Gadsden rose to be a brigadier general and threw up his commission on August 23, 1777, owing to some question of rank arising between him and General Howe, with whom he later fought a bloodless duel.†

He continued to serve in the Assembly and the Privy Council and in 1779 and 1780 actively prepared to repel the invasions of the State by the British.

When Prévost, in May, 1779, summoned the town of Charleston to surrender, the civil authorities proposed to stipulate for a neutrality during the war. This proposal was not made known to General Moultrie, the military commandant, and it was in violation of his rights. Gadsden—a member of the Council—voted against the proposal, and, though the deliberations of this body were required to be kept secret, he did not hesitate to communicate to certain citizens that such a measure had been decided on. It was resolved that the lives of its advocates should atone for the disgrace. This determination became known to the Council, and the negotiation was then referred where it should have gone in the first instance, to Moultrie, who said, "I will then save the city."‖

General Gadsden was Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina when the city of Charleston capitulated in 1780. He and others¶ were taken to a British garrison at St. Augustine. Refusing to give his parole, he was placed in solitary

* Johnson's *Traditions*, 41.

† Fully described by Mr. Porcher.

‖ Johnson's *Life of Greene*, i., 272.

¶ Johnson in his *Traditions* and Hough in *The Siege of Charleston*, p. 203, give their names.

confinement in a castle for ten months.* In 1782 the Jacksonborough Legislature elected him Governor, but pleading his thirty years' public service and his infirmities, he asked to be allowed to decline the arduous trust. On one memorable occasion alone after this he took part in public affairs. With unspeakable delight he took his seat in 1788 in the convention which ratified the Constitution of the United States.

He had always been a friend of efficient government, and many times during and after the war he feared that the independent Americans would form different confederacies. He dreaded as one of the greatest political evils that could befall his country the return to the royal government. At last he who had by his exertions in 1765 made possible the American Union, aided in 1788 in ratifying a Constitution meant to make it more perfect.

Well might he exclaim, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

He died, having passed his eighty-first year, and was buried with honor by the State Society of the American Revolution and the Society of the Cincinnati. He made no memorable orations, signed no renowned documents, won no distinguished battles; but no citizen of America ever engaged more zealously and unselfishly for so long a time in the service of the Union.

On one occasion, in a letter to the Honorable Thomas Bee, dated October 5, 1778, it became necessary for Gadsden to refer to his own public services and to his aspirations:

"I have had," he said, "without asking or soliciting any man's vote directly or indirectly, the honour to serve my country for many years in various stations, always totally devoted to that particular post occasionally allotted to me; never quitting it while the least hopes remained of having that necessary support the station required:—Zealous and

* Gadsden described his treatment while in confinement in a letter to Washington dated August 10, 1781.

attentive in all to the honour of the publick and their nearest concern: unbiased either by friend or foe, intimidated by none: constantly attending to my duty * * * and if I now towards the close of a long, disinterested and laborious service ask any favor * * * let it be to be looked upon as a citizen detesting licentiousness and totally devoted to the cause of equal *constitutional* liberty, religious and civil to all, Governors and governed, and having not a desire for himself or family in these respects that he does not from the bottom of his soul wish for every honest man in the State and indeed in all the world."*

* An appreciative sketch of Gadsden appears in ex-Gov. B. F. Perry's *Biographical Sketches of Eminent American Statesmen* (1887), pp. 264–269.

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